



**The Center for  
Family Justice**

## Testimony Supporting

### SB 294, An Act Concerning Housing Protections for Victims of Family Violence

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#### Housing Committee March 10, 2022

Good afternoon, Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee. The Center for Family Justice provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, legal assistance, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

Senate Bill 294 is one of CCADV's and The Center for Family Justice's priority bills. It seeks to prohibit a landlord from taking certain adverse actions against a tenant based on such tenant's family violence victim status.

Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Survivors face many unique barriers to finding safe and affordable housing because of the actions of their abuser. Financial abuse is present in 99% of abusive relationships, meaning that a survivor may lack access to the family's financial resources, have been forced into un- or underemployment, or had their credit destroyed, all compromising their ability to financially secure housing on their own, apart from their abuser. Survivors may also face a history of evictions or appear on a housing authority's "do not rent list" because of incidents or damage caused by the abuser. Housing instability can have a detrimental impact on survivors and their children, causing additional physical and mental health challenges.

The Center for Family Justice is in Fairfield County which has some of the most expensive housing in the state of Connecticut. According to Fairfield County Community Foundation's website, "In Fairfield County, Connecticut many households struggle to afford housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, and education. Part of the New York metro region, Fairfield County's 335,000 households span 23 cities and towns (incl. Stamford, Danbury, Norwalk, Fairfield, and Bridgeport). Though Fairfield County is home to a concentration of corporate, institutional, and private resources, it also suffers from the largest income and achievement gap of the 100 largest U.S. metro areas. Key challenges underlying regional economic and racial inequity include inequitable access to jobs, quality housing, and healthy neighborhoods. Minority, low-income residents migrate between Fairfield County's four major cities in search of housing, employment, education, and services."

This particularly affects victims of domestic violence in our region who are often isolated from family and friends, unable to work outside the home and subject to financial abuse. The ability to leave a current residence and find other affordable housing is not a reality for most of our clients. Recently, we worked with a client who came to us through the criminal court program. Her abuser has multiple criminal matters pending on the domestic violence docket. Even though criminal protective orders are in place, the abuser continues to come to her home to intimidate and threaten her. He causes a scene; our client is terrified, and the police are called. Her landlord continues to threaten to evict her if the abuser comes back to the apartment. No victim of domestic violence should be faced with the possibility of eviction and potential homelessness due to an abuser's violent behaviors. This woman has done everything in her power to stop her abuser from hurting her or coming to her home. She is now relying on the criminal justice to ensure she is safe from future abuse.



*Hope Starts Here*

753 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604 • Tel: 203/334-6154 • Fax: 203/579-8882 • [www.centerforfamilyjustice.org](http://www.centerforfamilyjustice.org)





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Why should she also be forced to deal with threats from her landlord? She is in crisis and instead of supporting her or helping her, her landlord is threatening eviction. Not because she broke the terms of her lease, but merely because she is a victim of domestic violence. This type of discrimination is unconscionable.

Connecticut's highly competitive housing market makes it increasingly difficult for victims to secure affordable housing, especially housing in their current neighborhood where they feel at home, where their children attend school, and where they are close to their support system. It is critical that we find ways to protect a victim's ability to remain safely in existing housing. Victims should not face housing discrimination or eviction because of their abuser's actions. This bill seeks to provide protections for victims related to eviction, increases in rent, refusal to renew a lease, decreases in services, and violations of lease agreements because of the violence committed against them. It will provide one tool for victims and their children to remain safely housed. We urge the Committee's support with the substitute language offered by CCADV.

Thank you for your consideration.

  
Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.  
Director of Civil Legal & Court Advocacy Services  
The Center for Family Justice  
203-334-6154

Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton



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